



CELEBRATING SOIL AND WATER STEWARDSHIP

IN THE
children's
HANDS
1999



"Tell your children of it, and let your children tell their children,
and their children another generation."

—Joel 1:3

IN THE CHILDREN'S HANDS 1999

The Soil and Water Stewardship Observance is celebrated in the United States to help remind all people of their individual responsibilities to care for our soil and water resources. By its very nature, the observance is one to be joined in by everyone (regardless of religious beliefs) who shares a sense of personal responsibility to care for our valued natural resources.

The roots of this special observance are deep in history. For centuries, men and women have offered humble thanks to God for the priceless gifts of soil, water, air and sunshine which sustain all living things. The world as we know it could not exist without fruitful agriculture and forestry. But nature, like man, is erratic. There are times when the very elements seem to conspire against a fruitful yield.

That is what happened in France more than 1500 years ago in the city of Vienne and its surrounding countryside. Bad weather, fires and earthquakes had brought crop failures and widespread hunger. The bishop of Vienne, Saint Mamertus, called for prayer and penance on the three days proceeding Ascension Day. The people responded and implored God for help in their suffering and privation.

Word of what happened in Vienne spread throughout France and then to other countries beyond the Alps. The supplication filled a need in the hearts and minds of other people, and as the years went by, the annual practice of setting aside these special Rogation Days was widely established.

In our own country, the decision to set aside a week each year to acknowledge before God our dependence on the gifts of the soil has met with wide acceptance. In parts of the South earlier in this century, a few church congregations began to set aside the fifth Sunday after Easter as Soil and Soul Sunday. Subsequently, this designation was changed to Soil Stewardship Sunday when, in 1946 the publishers of Farm and Ranch magazine took on promotion of the observance.

The response of clergy and lay leaders was so positive that observance of Soil Stewardship Sunday spread to other denominations in other states. In 1954, the publishers of the magazine suggested to the officers of the National Association of Conservation Districts (NACD) that they take on nationwide promotion of the observance. The national association, which represents 3000 local soil and water conservation districts, has now sponsored this observance since 1955. The development of the theme and supporting materials is guided by a Soil and Water Stewardship Advisory Committee, which includes representatives of a number of religious denominations.

The observance, now known as Soil and Water Stewardship Week, is celebrated each year between the last Sunday in April and the first Sunday in May. However, congregations are encouraged to celebrate the observance at any convenient time.

National Association of Conservation Districts • 408 East Main, League City, Texas 77573

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